

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims

1. (currently amended) A vacuum packaging machine for performing a vacuum sealing operation on a product package containing two or more products, comprising:

- a) [[a]] an in-feed conveyor; and
- b) a vacuum chamber;

the in-feed conveyor arranged to deliver the product package from an upstream station to a position adjacent the vacuum chamber, and having a longitudinal direction defined by the direction of travel of the product package on the in-feed conveyor;

the vacuum chamber arranged to receive the product package containing two or more products and perform a vacuum, sealing and cutting operation on the product package, the vacuum chamber comprising

- a) a heat sealing and cutting assembly, and
- b) end walls;

the heat sealing and cutting assembly being oriented transversely to the longitudinal direction of the in-feed conveyor, and located in a position in the vacuum chamber such that there is sufficient spacing between the end walls of the vacuum chamber and the heat sealing and cutting assembly for the product package containing two or more products to be loaded into the vacuum chamber with at least one product located in front of the heat sealing and cutting assembly and at least one other product located behind the heat sealing and cutting assembly, the heat sealing and cutting assembly arranged to seal and cut across the product package between two products to form two separate evacuated packages :

wherein the vacuum packaging machine comprises one or more chamber conveyors, disposed in the vacuum chamber, for receiving the product package into the vacuum chamber and/or conveying the product package from the vacuum chamber following the vacuum, sealing and cutting operation.

2. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the heat sealing and cutting assembly comprises a pair of heat seal bars.

3. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the heat sealing and cutting assembly comprises a pair of heat seal anvils.

4. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the heat sealing and cutting assembly comprises a cutting device which is operable to cut the product package after sealing, to thereby form two separate evacuated packages.

5.- 6. (canceled)

7. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the heat sealing and cutting assembly is configured to form two heat seal lines between the two products and then cut between the two heat seal lines to form two separate evacuated packages, following evacuation of the product package.

8. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, comprising an arrangement to clamp the portion of the package to be sealed, prior to sealing and cutting the package.

9. -10. (canceled)

11. (currently amended) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, comprising a puncturing device which is operable to puncture at least one aperture in the portion of the product package adjacent the sealing and cutting assembly so that as the vacuum and sealing operation occurs, air is evacuated from the package through the ~~punctured aperture (s) at least one aperture~~ prior to heat sealing.

12. (canceled)

13. (currently amended) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, configured arranged to receive, seal and separate a package having at least one open-end unsealed portion and containing at least two products, into individual product packages, and comprising at least one further heat sealing assembly spaced from the heat sealing and cutting assembly and configured to seal the at least one open-end unsealed portion of the package after evacuation while the heat sealing and cutting assembly carries out the sealing and cutting

operation across the product package between two products to form two individual product packages.

14. (currently amended) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the in-feed conveyor is configured to deliver the product package directly into the vacuum chamber in the longitudinal direction.

15. (canceled)

16. - 17. (canceled)

18. (currently amended) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the in-feed conveyor is arranged to deliver the product package to a position alongside the vacuum chamber, and comprising a further conveyor configured to load the product package from the conveyor into the vacuum chamber in a transverse direction.

19. - 20. (canceled)

21. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, which is indexed to align the portion of the product package between the two products with the heat sealing and cutting assembly.

22. - 23. (canceled)

24. (currently amended) The vacuum packaging machine ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 1, comprising a sensor, disposed above the in-feed conveyor, and upstream of the vacuum chamber, to sense the trailing edge of a leading product and/or a leading edge of a trailing product in the product package on [[a]] the in-feed conveyor.

25. - 26. (canceled)

27. - 28. (canceled)

29. (previously presented) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the vacuum packaging machine is configured to load and unload product packages concurrently.

30. - 31. (canceled)

32. (currently amended) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, in combination with a wrapping or bagging machine, disposed upstream of the vacuum chamber, arranged to load at least two products into each product package to be sealed in the vacuum packaging machine.

33. (canceled)

34. (previously presented) The combination of claim 32, wherein the wrapping or bagging machine is configured to position the products in each product package with a predetermined spacing.

35. (previously presented) The combination of claim 32, wherein the wrapping or bagging machine is programmable to vary the product package size or predetermined spacing.

36. – 61. (canceled)

62. (new) The vacuum packaging machine of claim 1, wherein the product package is in the form of a single sealed bag having two products therein, the products spaced apart from each other.